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Seven city CIOs work together

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Collaboration speeds development of tech solutions, cuts costs

In March 2010, a group of chief information officers from seven major cities found themselves at a press conference to announce new software for their cities' 311 systems. Working together for the conference gave them an idea: why not make this a habit?

Joined by a common interest in technology and common challenges, the CIOs for San Francisco, New York, Seattle, Washington, Boston, Los Angeles and Chicago formed the Gang of Seven, or Group of Seven, or just G7 for short. Today, the G7 members come together over twice-weekly conference calls to discuss issues facing their cities, and devise and share common solutions. They address issues ranging from vendor solutions to civic engagement, from cloud computing to federal and state regulations. "It's a natural coalition of people with similar challenges," says San Francisco acting CIO Jon Walton. "We have a shared body of experience, so we pull our resources together."

One of the hot topics right now with the G7 is open data, which is the idea of making government more transparent by allowing public access to data such as crime statistics, building permits, and city infrastructure. "Open data makes government more transparent and accessible, so residents can see what the city is doing," says Chicago CIO Jason DeHaan. The G7 members are working together to take a standard approach to the open data process, says Jay Nath, director of innovation for the San Francisco Department of Technology.

For example, the group is working to combine their data sites into a single portal. By having one portal for the data, cities can see where there is overlap and discuss those specific data sets. Coordinating on projects allows the G7 to develop new applications and solutions faster and cheaper than they could individually, Nath says. "We leverage each other on our successes," he says. "[The G7 cities] are more similar than different, and we need to not just think about our city."

Allison Reilly is a St. Louis-based freelance writer.

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